

# Highlights from the First Naval Aviation

## MAINTENANCE

## SAFETY SYMPOSIUM

*By Dan Steber*

More than 250 safety and maintenance professionals gathered April 23, 2003, at Naval Station Norfolk for the first safety symposium dedicated to naval-aviation maintenance. The three-day event was arranged by the Naval Safety Center's aircraft maintenance and material division.

Cdr. Al Stephens, the Naval Safety Center's maintenance officer, was surprised but pleased at the turnout. When asked for his opinion about the conference, he said, "I wasn't sure we would get 50 people. I'm happy to say that the 250 attendees make me a liar." It is interesting to note the conference was held while many squadrons and Sailors were involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

AMCS(AW) Carl Whatley and ATCS(AW/SW) Dave Clark addressed the group on how the idea for the conference developed. Senior Chief Clark said, "I ranted, raved, moaned, and groaned after a two-week survey about seeing the same problems over and over again. If I could only get all the maintenance safety people together in one room, I could give them the same information at the same time." Senior Chief Whatley said they collectively approached their boss and were told to do something to fix the problem. Out of those simple seeds, this conference grew.

The attendees came from every community and included visitors from the United Kingdom, Canada, U.S. Coast Guard, and even a graduate student working

CWO Mike Koropatniski, Maj. Denis Vachon and MWO Mark Sabad of Canada graciously discuss the pros and cons of the first aviation maintenance symposium. Two Brits in attendance added to the international flavor of the conference.



on a final thesis. They all came to hear the latest words and to see the products that will make them and their Sailors safer. The maintenance team arranged a series of presentations, including briefs on operational risk management, khaki risk management, safety media (magazines, posters and website), safety marketing, NavOSH, MFOQA, NAMP changes, traffic safety, and the various program areas looked at during safety surveys.

When asked what he expected from the conference, AEC Melvin Prince of VAQ-140, NAS Whidbey Island, Wash., responded, "I hope to get information to share with the troops. The Navy is good about safety, and this gathering is another way to show that point." Chief Prince has served for 20 years in various jobs and communities: EA-6B's, F-14's and AIMD's. "This conference will make us pay attention to what we actually have to do to reduce mishaps and errors." He ended by saying, "I tell my people they come to work with 10 fingers and 10 toes, and I want them to go home with the same number."

During a session on khaki risk management (KRM), ADCS(AW) Tim Davis reviews why mishaps occur.



Cdr. Ian Peck, Royal Navy, engineering policy officer at the Defence Aviation Safety Center (DASC), Ministry of Defence Central Command, wasn't sure what to expect but thought the scheduled sessions were comprehensive and well-balanced. His counterpart, LCdr. Ian Daniels of the DASC Human Factors Desk, said he had found out about the conference from Capt. John Schmidt (Naval Safety Center staff psychologist) and had confirmed attendance on the conference's online registry. He said, "The reason Ian and I came was to see how other services operate and to look for common lessons and best maintenance or safety practices."

CWO3 Edward Seifert, who works at MALS-12 in Iwakuni, Japan, said, "It's always good to get together with experts in the fleet and to bring different experiences and ideas to the table." He stated the gist of the conference, and what followed was one interesting presentation after another. Although the pace was fast and the potential for death by PowerPoint was high, a clear majority of the attendees thought the conference was successful.

Expectations ran high and conference critiques revealed that most people felt the conference met or exceeded their best hopes. There were minor problems with duplicate slides, a few sessions that went longer than planned, and some parts were applicable to a limited audience, but those lessons learned will improve the next conference.

MWO Mark Sabad from the Directorate of Flight Safety in Canada said he was unaware of the resources the Naval Safety Center promotes and that can be accessed and used, either by phone, fax or the website ([www.safetycenter.navy.mil](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil)). He added, "Even for a foreign aviation safety officer, there are a lot of tools available." AD1(AW) Eduardo Gonzalez of VFA-83 and CWO Mike Koropatniski of the Canadian Flight Safety Armament and Maintenance office both liked the session on the Military Flight Operations Quality Assurance (MFOQA) program. CWO Koropatniski said, "I can see the benefits of the program. However, I think there is a maintainer price to pay to reap the benefits."


The MMP, KRM and *Mech* magazine briefs were singled out as excellent. The multimedia briefs featured stories, photos and video clips that showed attendees the damage to equipment and injuries to maintainers that must be eliminated. CWO3 Seifert said, "The MMP brief made me realize we need to focus on educating and grooming our young Marines



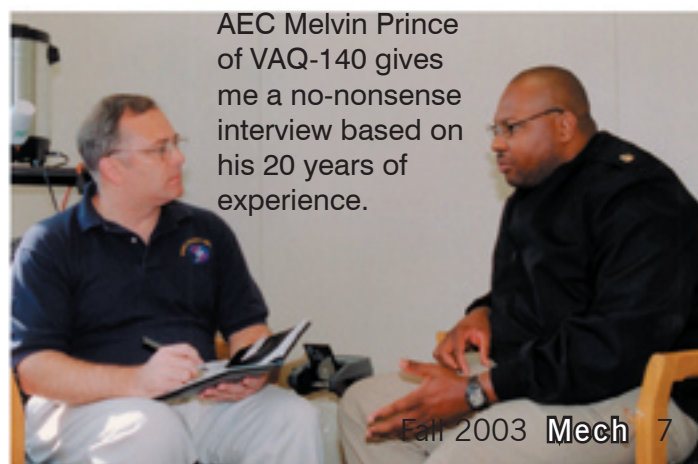
Mr. Clay Kemmerer, the Naval Safety Center data management division head, addresses the overflow crowd at Naval Station Norfolk.

and Sailors." AD1(AW) Gonzalez thought the session on media (*Mech*, posters and website) was dynamic, adding, "I enjoyed the historical portion of the magazines and its beginnings." Major Denis Vachon thought the KRM brief "...provided good material for training supervisors and groundcrew. It provided excellent information on support resources, and the groundcrew coordination training sessions were interesting."

An AirLant QA and AMMT inspector, AECS(AW) Larry King, felt the conference's strength was to get everyone on the same sheet of music. "I wanted to make sure we were on the ball, so our real boss, the customer, gets a coordinated answer," he said. "And the sessions made me reflect on my own mistakes. It was a great idea to get everyone together." He also felt that attendance should be mandatory for the QAO, QAS and the MMCO from every available squadron, adding, "If they came and picked up information on just one item, it would be worth the expense."

The Naval Safety Center agrees, and, because of the overwhelming response, the aircraft maintenance and material division has decided to do it again next year. The tentative dates are April 27-30, 2004, at Naval Station Norfolk. If you missed the symposium last year, make plans to attend in 2004. Visit our website at [www.safetycenter.navy.mil/aviation](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/aviation) for more information. 

Dan Steber is the editor of *Mech*.



AEC Melvin Prince of VAQ-140 gives me a no-nonsense interview based on his 20 years of experience.